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Sen. Hardiman's effort to rename state building in honor of Richard Austin signed by governor

LANSING – Because of Sen. Bill Hardiman's leadership, the state Treasury Building in Lansing will be named in honor of Richard Austin, a trailblazing former Michigan secretary of state.

At a ceremony today in the Capitol Rotunda, the governor signed legislation sponsored by Hardiman that made the name change. The event was attended by lawmakers and members of the Austin family.

"Richard Austin was a unique public servant in our state's history," said Hardiman, R-Kentwood. "He was the longest serving secretary of state. He was a gentleman and was always dedicated to the citizens of Michigan. The renaming of this building in his honor is a testament to his distinguished career."

Austin, who died in 2001 at the age of 87, represents a number of firsts for African Americans in Michigan. He was the first black secretary of state, serving from 1971 to 1994 as a Democrat, as well as being Michigan's first black major state officeholder. In 1941, he became the first black certified public accountant in Michigan.

Before becoming secretary of state, Austin served as Wayne County's auditor and before that had been the first black candidate for mayor of Detroit. He also participated in 1961 convention that drafted a new state constitution.

The legislation was Senate Bill 365.

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Note: Photographs of the bill signing are available on the senator's Web site, located at www.senate.michigan.gov/gop/photowire/Hardiman/Hardiman.htm.